

The Confessions of Persius¹

JOEL C. RELIHAN

Though it must be considered a false dichotomy, Persius the poet, not Persius the satirist, motivates the work of his most recent apologists.² The pale and withdrawn student of the handbooks recedes into the background, along with his Stoicism and moralizing, his youth and his relation to Neronian politics; now difficult language conveys a brash sensibility and a hard-won honesty, an uncontrollable anger and longing to write.³ His is the love of words, of concrete images, of scenes vividly realized;⁴ Sullivan applies to his poetry Pound's term *Logopoeia*.⁵ Were we to study Persius the way we study Pindar, it may be suggested, we would appreciate and not castigate his eccentricities.

But what does this do for the appreciation of Persius in the tradition of verse satire? Persius depicts himself as one who has gone to great lengths to create a poetic language and idiom not previously exemplified; what seem to be protestations of Horatian simplicity in *Satire 5* are quite misleading.⁶ Satire is personal expression; we should ask then how the language of Persius accomplishes the goal of self-revelation within the limits of his genre, and then what is the place of Persius in the history of his genre. I wish to argue for the following points: that the language of Persius' *Satires*

¹ An earlier version of this paper was delivered as a public lecture at the University of Illinois at Urbana in May 1988.

² J. P. Sullivan, "In Defence of Persius," *Ramus* 1 (1972) 58: "... Persius' art is a matter of *language*, not a matter of abstruse philosophical text." He argues against Cynthia Dessen, *Junctura Callidus Acri: A Study of Persius' Satires* (Urbana 1968), for separating satire and poetry; but the thrust of Sullivan's own essay is essentially poetic.

³ Kenneth Reckford, "Studies in Persius," *Hermes* 90 (1962) 500: "... the truth emerges with a bang. Satire, then, not only operates on a sick society but provides a necessary release for the pent-up feelings of the satirist..." I have been especially indebted to Reckford's essay in the preparation of this article.

⁴ Peter Connor, "The Satires of Persius: A Stretch of the Imagination," *Ramus* 16 (1987) 75-77 argues cleverly against the handbook view that Persius speaks without reference to human experience.

⁵ "In Defence of Persius" (above, note 2) 59-60; an opinion taken up by Mark Morford, *Persius* (Boston 1984) 94-95.

⁶ W. S. Anderson, "Persius and the Rejection of Society," in *Essays on Roman Satire* (Princeton 1982) 170 ff.

is a private language, a language of self-communion; that his satires are in the main constructed as dialogues within the author's self; that the *Satires* are not primarily directed toward an external audience; that there is a coherent progression within the book of satires that culminates in the rejection of the profession of satirist; that the topic of the *Satires* as a book is how Persius fails to be a satirist. That Persius speaks to himself has been both vigorously maintained and denied in various individual satires (particularly *Satire 3*); that Persius speaks of his own faults has been vehemently rejected;⁷ it is even denied that the author's personality makes any real appearance in the *Satires*.⁸ And while we are right to reject the notion that the *Satires* are versified Stoic dogma,⁹ we should not go so far in labelling his thoughts as commonplaces that we overlook the fact the Stoicism provides the intellectual framework of the *Satires*.

As Anderson's famous article has it, Persius has rejected society. But there is more here than the Stoic wise man turning his back on incurable fools, and the *Satires* are not just written for the aesthetic appreciation of the select few. The Stoic should take his place in society, but Persius does not; the recurrent metaphor of doctor and patient in the *Satires* describes an ideal state of affairs, but Persius seems to have no interest in the patient's cure.¹⁰ The satirist is primarily concerned with himself, and writes for himself.¹¹ The *Satires* show us with what anxiety he pinpoints his own successes and failings, for I think that his understanding of human error is derived from self-reflection.¹² As he puts it at 4. 52, *tecum habita: noris quam sit tibi curta supellex*, "Live in your own house, and you will learn how meager the furnishings are." This moral advice is general, and includes Persius himself, the Stoic poet who is Stoic enough and consistent enough to know that all sins are equal, and that all sinners, even if they have different expectations and hopes of progress to perfection, are equally far from the truth.¹³ Persius

⁷ See Edwin S. Ramage, "Method and Structure in the Satires of Persius," *JCS* 4 (1979) 138 n. 5: "It is important to notice that Persius never admits directly to having faults . . . He does, however, include himself in the first person plural where he effectively dilutes his own shortcomings by making them part of humanity's." Ramage takes pains to refute the view that *Satire 3*, with its description of the lazy person in bed at mid-morning, is a description of the poet himself.

⁸ Anderson (above, note 6) 178-79.

⁹ Reckford (above, note 3) 490-98 ("Persius and Stoicism").

¹⁰ Anderson (above, note 6) 178-79.

¹¹ Here I extend the observation made by Reckford (above, note 3) 500: "The reverse side of this *indignatio* is a very modern isolation. We see it in Persius' obscure inwardness of metaphor and thought, and again, in his sense of writing for himself (*Sat.* I. 2-8)."

¹² Anderson states well the opinion that I oppose (above, note 6) 179: Persius does not reveal himself, and "his satirist is monochromatic, monotonous (if you will). He is the steady incarnation of *sapientia*."

¹³ D. L. Sigsbee, "The *paradoxa Stoicorum* in Varro's *Menippeans*," *CP* 71 (1976) 244-48, is a good introduction to the possibilities of Stoicism in satire. For the question of guilt and sin in Stoic thought, see J. M. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge 1969) 81-96 (Ch. 5, "All Sins Are Equal").

does not present himself as a sage, and therefore the frequent references to vice as proof of madness reflect on Persius as well.¹⁴ We must take Persius' Stoicism seriously: Persius has lived in his own house, and offers advice based on his own self-examination. And Stoicism itself advocates private meditation as a path to self-discovery: Seneca recommends as a cure for anxiety a dialogue within oneself, in which one imagines all of one's fears and thus overcomes them (*Ep.* 24. 2).¹⁵ It is inner dialogue and confession that I find most compelling as an informing principle in Persius; I hope to explain how such a concept of the value and function of satire, as self-examination rather than social correction, is in fact at the heart and not at the periphery of verse satire.

Verse Satire: Some General Considerations

If we take the programmatic satires of Horace, Persius, and Juvenal at face value, we should draw the conclusion that there are two types of Roman verse satire (leaving that of Ennius to one side, whom the extant satirists, beyond the oblique reference at Horace *Serm.* 1. 10. 66, do not mention). That of Lucilius is the ideal, and that of the extant satirists is a falling away from an ideal; they operate in the shadow of Lucilius, conscious of the fact that they are not Lucilius. The extant practitioners of the genre know that their satires cannot do what satire is supposed to do, which is to present a vivid portrait of a critic arraigning vice (cf. Horace's famous words on the presence of the life of Lucilius in his *Satires*, *Serm.* 2. 1. 32-34: *quo fit ut omnis / uotiva pateat ueluti descripta tabella / uita senis*). They claim that the traditions of Old Comedy lie behind those of verse satire, and in effect they lament their inability to criticize as the comedians did, violently, truthfully, and by name.¹⁶ Accordingly, they present their works as being

¹⁴ Persius, the "doctrinaire poet," is admired for the sternness and simplicity of his moral views, but the implications of such views for his own nature are, it seems to me, overlooked. M. Coffey, *Roman Satire* (London and New York 1976) 111 is typical: "As a Stoic he frequently associates wrongdoing with madness; the paradox that none but the Stoic sage is sane, which is mocked by Horace, is accepted without irony by Persius."

¹⁵ *Sed ego alia te ad securitatem uia ducam: si uis omnem sollicitudinem exuere, quidquid uereris ne eueniat euenturum utique propone, et quodcumque est illud malum, tecum ipse metire ac timorem tuum taxa: intelleges profecto aut non magnum aut non longum esse quod metuis.* See Robert J. Newman, "Rediscovering the *De Remediis Fortuitorum*," *AJP* 109 (1988) 92-107. In this work, *meditatio* is a sort of interior dialogue; Newman defends its attribution to Seneca.

¹⁶ J. C. Bramble, *Persius and the Programmatic Satire, A study in Form and Imagery* (Cambridge 1974) 190-204 (Appendix 4: "The Disclaimer of Malice") looks to Aristotelian theories of liberal humor as a motivating force for a lack of personal invective in satire and other genres (iambic poetry, epigram) rather than to the possible influence of legal restrictions which may prevent a satirist from naming names and being specific. But the satirists themselves accept the Varronian invention of Old Comedy as a satiric source, and lament the lack of its freedoms; satire presents liberal humor as a distant second-best. It does not matter here that the satirists also perpetuate the already ancient misunderstanding of Athenian comedy as necessarily relating historically true information about the characters that it attacks; cf. Stephen Halliwell,

themselves emblematic of decay and an indictment of the divorce between literature and public life.¹⁷ I would say then that in Horace we see the beginning of an inward turning of verse satire, in which the true topic of a satire (or, better, of a book of satires) is the poet's inability to correct or improve his society in any meaningful way. He cannot improve society, but he can speak of himself. The persona created in a book of satires is not that of a censor and critic, but of an ineffective censor and critic, who reveals why he is incapable of changing the world around him.

Two further points need to be made about the nature of hexameter satire. First, the genre is essentially a comic one. By this, I do not mean that it tries to tell the truth with a laugh; rather, by virtue of its epic meter and the fact that the content of the poems is entirely inappropriate for such a meter, there is an essential incongruity of form and topic which mocks the first person opinions expressed. How are we to react to someone who arraigns everyday vice in an epic voice? Juvenal certainly is aware of the incongruity: as he says, the great difficulty in writing satire is finding a natural talent that is equal to the distasteful material (1. 150-1: *unde / ingenium par materiae?*); his Muses need not sing, but may sit down (4. 34-5: *incipere, Calliope, licet et considerare. non est / cantandum, res uera agitur*). It is a good exercise to view satire as the opposite side of the coin of pastoral, which exploits a similar incongruity of form and topic for a frequently light-hearted view of the idyllic, rather than the debased, world. Second, introspection in a comic genre leads to self-parody. Now here I do not mean that the satirist cannot possibly mean what he says, that his anger, or his fulmination against vices perceived by society as normal, labels him a joker. Remember what is to be found in Horace, the comfortable insider: a critic of society is himself a social undesirable. We are too easily misled by Horace's *ridentem dicere uerum / quid uetat?* (*Serm.* 1. 1. 24-25).¹⁸ No one does oppose a mixture of comedy and truth; it is a thoroughly unobjectionable combination. This is no manifesto for a

"Ancient interpretations of ὀνομαστί κωμωδεῖν in Aristophanes," *CQ* 78 (1984) 83-88. C. A. Van Rooy, *Studies in Classical Satire and Related Literary Theory* (Leiden 1965) 145-50 describes how Old Comedy is invoked less and less through time to explain the nature and origin of satire, to the point that Juvenal does not mention it or its freedom of speech, but rather bemoans the specific loss of Lucilian *libertas*.

¹⁷ Van Rooy (previous note) 150, rightly balances loss of political freedoms and the satirists' self-confidence in their new Roman genre as explanations for the lack of direct political and social criticism in verse satire.

¹⁸ Niall Rudd, *Themes in Roman Satire* (London 1986) 1 gives an intelligent description of this view of satire as comic criticism: "Roman satirists may be thought of as functioning within a triangle of which the apices are (a) attack, (b) entertainment, and (c) preaching. If a poem rests too long on apex (a) it passes into lampoon or invective; if it lingers on (b) it changes into some sort of comedy; and if it remains on (c) it becomes a sermon. In this triple function preaching appears to have a less important status than the other two."

crusading critic, but a program for politesse. Lucilius may have been funny, but his followers are unanimous in saying that he tore the city to shreds (*secuit urbem*, as Persius has it at 1. 114; Juvenal 1. 165–68: *ense uelut stricto quotiens Lucilios ardens / infremuit, rubet auditor cui frigida mens est / criminibus, tacita sudant praecordia culpa. / inde irae et lacrimae*).¹⁹ But Horace apologizes when he removes his humor to give serious advice. It is impolite to criticize; the advocacy of common sense in Horace is a rejection of Lucilian censoriousness; and the self-parodic interests of Horace are not hard to find.

The Lucilian ideal of self-depiction through social criticism has not been lost to the post-Lucilian satirists, who however show themselves inadequate for the task of satire. The inadequate satirist is not just a victim of libel laws and lack of freedom under the Empire; rather, the influence of the genre of Menippean satire turns what would be a defect into a virtue. Varro's *Menippeans* (81–67 B. C.), which fall chronologically between Lucilius (132–102) and Horace (the 30's B. C.), may be viewed as what fills the void created in the Lucilian ideal by the passing away of direct attack. I think that the *Menippeans* constitute a large stone dropped into the stream of verse satire, and we can observe diminishing waves of influence from Varro: from more to less self-parody from Horace to Persius to Juvenal; from a greater to a lesser realization of the incongruity inherent in discussing social matters in epic verse, and thus from a greater to a lesser use of fantasy; from less to more moral earnestness.²⁰ It is not just that the genre of verse satire allows for a very free mixture of possible elements, but that there is a coherent change through time that can be explained by the intersection of the traditions of verse and Menippean satire. Menippean satire turns upon a critic's self-parody, as he realizes that his intellect is not sufficient either to understand or to influence the madness of the world around him, whose *ad hoc* theories and explanations fail in the face of experience, and whom the world ignores and leaves behind.²¹ Hexameter satire after Varro will focus on the author's moral rather than his intellectual failings, on how the corrupt world allows him to understand himself, and on how the author chooses ultimately to ignore and separate himself from this world. The *Satires* of Persius afford documentation of this view of the nature of verse satire.

¹⁹ Bramble (above, note 16) 195–96, notes that even Lucilius disclaims malice in a number of fragments, but concludes: "Even if we discount the violence attributed by later portraits, it is probably fair to say that Lucilian practice was divorced from theory—but not to the degree of malignancy attributed by received opinion."

²⁰ For this last point see Reckford (above, note 3) 499, who has it that Persius sees a need to add invective to Horatian irony, thus leading the way to Juvenal.

²¹ I present this view of Menippean satire in "Martianus Capella, the Good Teacher," *Pacific Coast Philology* 22 (1987) 59–70.

The Prologue and the Unity of the Six Satires

A number of traditional topics of study concerning Persius I leave to one side: to what extent Persius is to be related to the literary groups and movements of his day;²² to what extent he copies, adapts, and reworks Horatian themes and language;²³ analysis, criticism, or defense of his highly idiosyncratic language;²⁴ the chronology of the individual satires. I wish to concentrate on a different aspect, the extent to which the *Satires* form a coherent book.

I think that Roman satire never lost the original notion that satire was composed in books; this is true in Ennius and in Lucilius, and there is no break in the tradition. The prologue of Persius' *Satires* is an important piece of evidence for this: it introduces the following satires as a collection, it announces the main theme, and does so in scazons, so that we can say that Persius' *satura*, like Ennius', consists of poems in varied meters.²⁵ An analogy may help: Persius' *Satires* are like a song in six stanzas, with an introduction that sets the theme—passion and money motivate everyone, even (especially?) the rustic poet himself.

Nec fonte labra prolui caballino
nec in bicipiti somniasse Parnasso
memini, ut repente sic poeta prodirem.
Heliconidasque pallidamque Pirenen
illis remitto quorum imagines lambunt
hederae sequaces; ipse semipaganus
ad sacra uatum carmen adfero nostrum.
quis expediuit psittaco suum 'chaere'
picamque docuit nostra uerba conari?
magister artis ingenique largitor
uenter, negatas artifex sequi uoces.
quod si dolosi spes refulserit nummi,
coruos poetas et poetridas picas
cantare credas Pegaseium nectar.

²² Very nicely discussed by C. Witke, "Persius and the Neronian institution of literature," *Latomus* 43 (1984) 802–12.

²³ R. A. Harvey, *A Commentary on Persius*, Mnemosyne Suppl. 64 (Leiden 1981), provides a tabulation in the note on *Sat.* 1. 12; see also D. M. Hooley, "Mutatis Mutandis. Imitations of Horace in Persius' First Satire," *Arethusa* 17 (1984) 81–94, who sees in *Satire* 1 a response to Horace's *Ars Poetica*.

²⁴ E. Paratore, "Surrealismo e iperrealismo in Persio," in *Homages à Henry Bardon*, Collection Latomus 187 (1985) 277–90, summarizing and extending Bardon's work on Persius' language.

²⁵ Even in the Renaissance it is possible to write a book of poems in various meters and call it a satire; cf. the *Saturae* of Giovanni Pascoli (A. Traina, ed. [Firenze 1968]). The volume consists of two collections of poems in various meters, entitled *Catullo calvos* and *Fanum Vacunae*.

The passage is much discussed and debated.²⁶ A few points, I think, may still be made. I begin from a paraphrase. "I did not drink of Pegasus' spring to become a poet. I leave the Muses and their spring to dead poets. I am an uninitiated outsider, bringing my own poem myself to the precincts of holy poetry. The belly bestows a modest talent to parrots and magpies, a simple use of words their own nature denies them. But if money is before your eyes, you would believe that crow-poets and magpie-poetesses *do* sing the true nectar of Pegasus." Two points: first, that the references to the stream of Pegasus unite the halves of the poem quite closely;²⁷ second, the one for whom there is the hope of cash (there is an ambiguous lack of a dative of reference in the phrase *quod si dolosi spes refulserit nummi*) is better taken as referring to the subject of *credas*.²⁸ The poem would assert: I am not a poet, and my motivation is my stomach; yet an audience of sycophants would readily believe I am a poet. It is a point made throughout *Satire* 1, that the audience of a poet is utterly indifferent to the truth, and that a poet's interest in the approval of his audience is wholly misplaced.²⁹ It is the corrupt audience, not the poet's own greed, that creates undeserved and distorted praise of the glories of a poet's verse. The poem is not merely about the poet's rejection of divine inspiration, but also about the possibility of his audience's false perception of a divine inspiration.³⁰

²⁶ Cf. D. Korzeniewski, "Der Satirenprolog des Persius," *RhM* 121 (1978) 329–49 (not noticed in Harvey's *Commentary*) provides detailed analysis, explaining its function as a prologue and defending its unity.

²⁷ Korzeniewski (previous note) 334 shows how the fourteen lines are written in groups of 3, 4, 4, and 3 verses, in which 1–3 mirror 12–14, 4–6a mirror 10–11, 6b–7 mirror 8–9; and describes in detail how the first seven lines are metrically peculiar, the last seven overly correct, in accordance with the types of poetry discussed. "Der Gegensatz zwischen Maske (*fons caballinus* und *somnium*) und Demaskierung (*uenter* und *spes nummi*) ist zugleich Klammer und Trennung der beiden Heptaden" (334). However, U. W. Scholz, "Persius," in J. Adamietz, ed., *Die Römische Satire* (Darmstadt 1986) 191, takes the poem as falling into at best vaguely related halves: "Unverbunden mit diesem spöttisch-apologetischen, selbstrühmenden Gedicht verfolgt das zweite Stück (prol. 8–14) einen Anderen Ansatz vor dem gleichen thematischen Hintergrund."

²⁸ The suggestion of Harvey (above, note 23) 9 that the last sentence must be taken as a question ("would money inspire magpie-poets to produce fine poetry?") is necessary, if one presumes that it is the poets who have the hope of deceitful cash; but the sentence does cohere with what goes before as a direct statement if it is the audience that is dazzled. Reckford (above, note 3) 503 points the way: "The end of the choliambes may be satirizing the deluded critic whose belly forces him, like the stuffed clients in *Satire* I, to praise his patron's bad efforts."

²⁹ Korzeniewski (above, note 26) 331 views the bird-poets of the prologue as symbolic anticipations of the poets of *Satire* 1: "Die Dichter, die im Prolog in der Maskerade der Vögel begegnen, kehren in der ersten Satire als wirkliche Menschen wieder."

³⁰ J. F. Miller, "Disclaiming Divine Inspiration. A Programmatic Pattern," *WS N.F.* 20 (1986) 151–64, discusses this poem and similar disclaimers in Propertius and Ovid, but makes a different point: that the discussion of inspiration here denies inspiration as a motivation for poetry because it neglects the question of *ars*; that the belly is a perverter of one's natural talents; and that ultimately Persius disassociates himself from the poets of the belly (162–63).

The poet speaks of himself; this is not a case of indignation making the verses that talent denies, but hunger. He has disclaimed the name of poet and the desire for a poet's praise. He is comparing himself to the parrot and magpie, in that he composes poetry, a thing which is not in his nature, out of a hunger not for justice or truth but food. The working out of this theme, that there is no noble or intellectually valid or morally compelling reason for writing satire, may be documented in a number of lines of argument that are present in the unity which is the six poems: the poet's dialogue with himself, the Stoic doctrine of the equality of sins and sinners, the belief that money and passion always reveal the fool, and the preaching from experience. It is to these devices that I now turn.

Diatribes and Inner Dialogue

The history of the diatribe receives its due attention in literary studies, and its techniques, motifs, and argumentative habits are well known. What is not so well appreciated I think is the fact that the diatribe is not just an elastic medium, but is in fact a form of discourse susceptible to a number of literary and poetic transformations. The diatribe is not to be viewed as a genre, but as a style of oratorical argument,³¹ and argument can be used, of course, in a number of different ways. Therefore, the diatribe is not one fixed form, but its internal characteristics and logic can be altered, played with, parodied and abused, to create a number of interesting literary phenomena. For example, Menippus takes Cynic anti-dogmatism so far as to represent even Cynic truth as a lie when it is presented as a logical conclusion persuasively argued;³² it is the *parody* of the diatribe that gives rise to Menippean satire, a parody that is obvious in the *Menippeans* of Varro, in which the preacher appeals to the fantastic to make a point, or tries to subsume scholarly nit-picking into his popular form. Perhaps most important, the assumption of a Cynic guise for the preaching of the glories of Republican agricultural conservative Rome is a comic contradiction in terms and a running joke.

Similar comic use of the diatribe may be found in verse satire. Everyone admits to its influence in the genre, and sees in it an avenue to the persuasive and popular presentation of the horrors of vice and the need for virtue. But the case is not so simple as this. Horace provides a number of examples, especially in Book 2 of his *Satires*, of the boring and pretentious diatribe or harangue which he puts in the mouth of someone else, so that we see the author laughing at the preacher while trying to avoid the moral implications of the comic preacher's criticisms. Horace is willing to show

³¹ J. F. Kindstrand, *Bion of Borysthenes* (Uppsala 1976) 97-99.

³² Lucian at *Nekyomantia* 21-22 depicts Menippus learning the Cynic truth about life from Teiresias and then returning to the upper world to preach that truth through the oracular hole of the false prophet Trophonius.

both himself and the diatribist as fools (2. 3. 326): *o maior tandem parcas, insane, minori*, "And yet, o greater fool, spare, I pray, the lesser," as he concludes Damasippus' more than 300-line Stoic sermon at *Sermones* 2. 3. Persius presents a similar distance from the preacher's truths in *Satire* 3.³³ The programmatic satires of all three hexameter satirists speak of the fact that no one wants to hear a satire: we should not just read this as a condemnation of a deaf, hard-hearted, and vice-ridden community, but also as an open confession of the uselessness of satire and diatribe when it comes to effective social criticism and advocacy of moral change. No one wants to, and no one will, heed a critic.

The conclusion of Persius' first *Satire* speaks of him *burying* his secret about Rome in his book as Midas' barber buried his secret in a patch of weeds: "Who does not have the ears of an ass?" (1. 119–23):

me muttire nefas? nec clam? nec cum scrobe? nusquam?
hic tamen infodiam. uidi, uidi ipse, libelle:
auriculas asini quis non habet? hoc ego opertum,
hoc ridere meum, tam nil, nulla tibi uendo
Iliade.

It is claimed that this burial is mere pretense, as the book itself immediately reveals the secret, just as the ditch revealed the secret about Midas' ears which his barber had entrusted to it.³⁴ We should indeed take the mythological parallel seriously: the author, like the barber, needs to speak but finds no audience; he speaks to no one, in order to unburden himself of his secret; he learns that the confidence he placed in something seemingly safe has betrayed him; and the revelation has done no good, and least of all to himself. The book may well have a life beyond the author's intentions, and betrays him. I think that a good deal of the first *Satire* revolves around this very point: satire is Persius' private joke, pointless as far as society is concerned ("This hidden thing, this laughter of mine, so valueless, I sell to you for no *Iliad*"); insofar as it is known, it shows him in a bad light. There is no reason why an author cannot claim that his book does not do him justice.

In this light, the opening of the poem acquires interesting overtones when literally read (1–3):

O curas hominum! quantum est in rebus inane!
"quis leget haec?" min tu istud ais? nemo hercule. "nemo?"
uel duo uel nemo. "turpe et miserabile." quare?

³³ Reckford (above, note 3) 496, comments on *Satire* 3 as follows: "The resemblance to the author of the person corrected rather than the corrector is an Horatian indirection, a placation of the reader through ironic self-criticism, and a refusal to accept full responsibility for any sermon as such. Undoubtedly, Persius considered the avoidance of dogmatism a prerequisite of sincerity. This is not to say that Persius found the content of the sermon embarrassing, only the form."

³⁴ Bramble (above, note 16) 136–37.

The author tells his interlocutor that no one, or two at most, will read his poems, and he doesn't care. It isn't important to the author if his poems are read. This poetry is a private affair.³⁵ Further, we can specify who this interlocutor is, and thus define who the "two people or none" are. The imaginary interlocutor, or *aduersarius fictiuus*, is traditionally in the diatribe a straw man who raises objections for the speaker to triumph over. He tries to cite contradictory authorities, may make fun of the speaker's intentions, and may oppose the speaker's conclusions. It is the *aduersarius fictiuus*, I believe, that leads to that most interesting of Menippean developments, the literary presentation of the split personality, as the *aduersarius* becomes the author's own second thoughts or other half. Bakhtin makes Menippean satire the origin of this phenomenon, which he finds not only in such works as Varro's *Bimarcus* ("The Author Split in Two") but even in Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* and Augustine's *Confessions*.³⁶ But it is also prominent in Persius, and one of the keys to understanding his book. The opening section of the poem concluded, the poet then proceeds to say (1. 44-47):

quisquis es, o modo quem ex aduerso dicere feci,
non ego cum scribo, si forte quid aptius exit,
quando haec rara auis est, si quid tamen aptius exit,
laudari metuum; neque enim mihi cornea fibra est.

"Whoever you are, o you whom I have caused to speak in opposition, I do not, when I write, if something rather snappy comes out, when there is this rare bird, if something rather snappy comes out, live in fear of praise, nor are my guts made of horn."

"Whoever you are, o you whom I have caused to speak in opposition:" it is certainly not a habit of the diatribe to speculate about the nature of the imaginary interlocutor. It should be obvious that the creation of a dialogue by a poet is inherently a dialogue with himself; but in Persius the potential is made actual. Persius is talking to himself. And if Persius does not know who the interlocutor is, but has called him into being, then I think we have a fair indication that the poem presents Persius himself and that not entirely known quantity which is something like an inner voice.

³⁵Satire 5, the dialogue between Persius and Cornutus, is explicit: *secrete loquimur* (5. 21). Ettore Paratore, *Biografia e Poetica di Persio* (Firenze 1968) 187 n. 65 suggests that here we have a poetic plural, Persius speaking to himself (note that Paratore reads *secreti*, and does not think it inevitable that Cornutus speaks vv. 5-21): "... forse *Secreti loquimur* è un *pluralis pro singulari* in cui il poeta si vanta del proprio meditativo isolamento per aprirsi la strada a parlare della consegna dei propri *praecordia* a Comuto." Korzeniewski objects to this interpretation in a review of Paratore's *La poetica di Persio* (Roma 1964) 123 in which the words are translated "io parlo con me stesso in disparte;" but Korzeniewski's parallels for taking *secrete* as *μυστικῶς* in a true dialogue with Cornutus do not seem convincing (*Gnomon* 37 [1965] 777).

³⁶Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. C. Emerson (Minneapolis 1984) 106-22.

The first *Satire* ends with a device typical of satire and other genres, the selection of the specific audience for the poems. The models in satire for such a passage are Lucilius, Book 26, F589–96 K, and Horace *Serm.* 1. 10. 78–92. But is it accidental that Persius' models speak of a number of potential readers, and of specific individuals, and that Persius speaks only in the singular, and in the second person, of a reader unnamed?

audaci quicumque adflate Cratino
iratum Eupolidem praegrandi cum sene palles,
aspice et haec, si forte aliquid decoctius audis.
inde uaporata lector mihi ferueat aure . . . (1. 123-6)

Commentators assume that this is an appeal for a plural readership (a reasonable assumption) and that the appeal to those who have read Aristophanes (*praegrandi sene*) is a laudatory one. But this is a hasty assumption, reflecting the modern appreciation of Aristophanes the brilliant poet; the situation is more complex. Persius here imitates Horace *Serm.* 1. 4. 1–5, in which Horace only praises Old Comedy for pointing out publicly and by name those worthy of censure.³⁷ But Persius asks specifically for a *reader* of Aristophanes; this is a call for an antiquary and a pedant, for only these read Old Comedy at this time.³⁸ Aristophanes and the poets of Old Comedy are a mine of Attic forms and vocabulary worked by scholars³⁹. Persius asks such a person whether his language is not better than that of Aristophanes. *Decoctius* may mean more boiled down, more concentrated than the diffuse (or perhaps diluted, to continue the metaphor) writings of Old Comedy,⁴⁰ but the specific reference is to language itself and to its

³⁷ Eupolis atque Cratinus Aristophanesque poetae
atque alii, quorum comoedia prisca uirorum est,
siquis erat dignus describi, quod malus ac fur,
quod moechus foret aut sicarius aut alioqui
famosus, multa cum libertate notabant.

³⁸ Franz Quadlbauer, "Die Dichter der griechischen Komödie im literarischen Urteil der Antike," *WS* 73 (1960) 52 ff., points out that Roman authors typically viewed Menander as the superior author, and that Phrynichus' praise of Aristophanes in the second century A.D. is to be viewed as a reaction against this attitude. Quadlbauer takes Persius' description of the Old Comedians as an attack against those who value them too highly; Persius' *aliquid decoctius* is superior to Aristophanes, the best of them (p. 61).

³⁹ Athenaeus and Phrynichus are perfect examples; cf also Lucian, *Ind.* 27, who speaks of Aristophanes and Eupolis as authors who ought to be known by someone who prides himself on a knowledge of arcane lore.

⁴⁰ *Decoctius* is problematic. Bramble (above, note 16) 139 and n. 1 takes *decoctius* as a laudatory culinary metaphor for style, in contrast to the disparaging ones which have appeared throughout the beginning of the satire in reference to other works of literature: "*decoquere* describes the refined density of Persius' manner, the opposite of the undigested style—the *crudum* or *turgidum*—of his opponents." But Korzeniewski, "Die erste Satire des Persius," in D. Korzeniewski, ed., *Die Römische Satire, Wege der Forschung* 238 (Darmstadt 1970) 426–27 takes *decoctius* as referring to a *decoctum* or *decoctio*, a warm plaster, continuing the medical imagery of the satire; and it is from this warm poultice of Persius' own writing that the reader is to have the ears steamed clean. Apart from the problem of taking the comparative adjective in

difficulty, not to the presentation of things that would improve the public morals.⁴¹ The pallor of exhausted study contained in the verb *palles* supports this interpretation of the pedantic nature of the reader of Old Comedy.⁴² Persius, *iunctura callidus acri*, prides himself on expression, not on social utility; though he distances himself from Horace in not speaking of Aristophanes as a corrector of public morals, he is very much in Horace's camp in thinking that style is the essence of satire. Persius is not calling for the morally upright to read him, though he will go on to reject the morally base (1. 127-34). He looks for those removed from society, who will look from Aristophanes to Persius only for examples of more striking writing. In this light, the select few chosen as the audience for the *Satires* emphasize the private nature of the poet's enterprise more than the entrusting of difficult ethical truths and criticisms to those who can actually profit by them; certainly there is here no program for the improvement of society.

But can reading Old Comedy have a positive moral effect? Is the tradition of accurate public indictment of vice in Old Comedy sufficient to overcome, in a Stoic moralist's eyes, its clearly less desirable features?⁴³ Aristophanes becomes proverbial as the author who makes fun of serious things.⁴⁴ Plutarch's comparison of Aristophanes and Menander assails the former for indiscriminate use of extreme expressions, for obscurity and vulgarity, for failure to address people of different stations in appropriate ways, for coarseness and depravity; Aristophanes is not tolerable for the

this sense of "more like a plaster" (the appeal to 1. 45, *si forte quid aptius exit*, does not seem a valid parallel), there is the logical difficulty of having the author pick as his audience those who read his works and are improved by them—this is tautological. Rather, he should be defining those characteristics already possessed by those whom he would have as an audience.

⁴¹ Reckford (above, note 3) 476-83, points out that of the many passages in Persius in which metaphors concerning the ear and the infusion of learning through the ear occur, only in this passage do we find *auris*, signifying the healthy ear; all others have the contemptuous diminutive *auricula*. *Aliquid decoctius* suggests to Reckford "an infusion of alcoholic syrup" (482). But Anderson (above, note 6) 174-75, notes the problem: the ideal reader of Persius already has a well-cleaned ear, and can appreciate Persius' style as well as his content. But what can we say of the moral stance of a satirist who speaks only to those who are healthy, yet who speaks of his message as the medicine that will clean the ears of the sick?

⁴² Harvey's note *ad loc.* takes *palles* as meaning, more naturally, "grow pale through fear;" the meaning "grow pale through study" would be a "novel extension" of the word's meaning. But surely the few who read Old Comedy are not themselves fearful of that poet's invective.

⁴³ For the reality of Athenian comic personal abuse, cf. Halliwell (above, note 16).

⁴⁴ Lucian, *Pisc.* 25; *Bis Acc.* 33. Lucian knows some phrases and plot summaries of Aristophanes and uses them liberally; cf. Graham Anderson, *Lucian, Theme and Variation in the Second Sophistic*, Mnemosyne Suppl. 41 (Lugduni Batavorum 1976) 183-84. Lucian also depicts himself in the above passages as one who has debased both Philosophy and Dialogue by mixing, among other things, Old Comedy into his comic dialogues.

wise man.⁴⁵ It is comic to speak of those whose ears have been cleansed by the reading of Aristophanes (1. 126: *inde uaporata lector mihi ferueat aure*),⁴⁶ who have overlooked the obscenity to see only the style. The audience that Persius imagines is a little ridiculous.

After Persius addresses the voice that he has created as his *aduersarius*, he continues (1. 48–50):

sed recti finemque extremumque esse recuso
 "euge" tuum et "belle." nam "belle" hoc excute totum:
 quid non intus habet?

"But I do not allow that the end and goal of the right is your 'Bravo' and 'Well done!' Make this 'Well done!' stand a thorough frisk: what does it not have concealed on its person?"

The debate within the author on the relative merit of literary value and social effectiveness is exactly that of Varro's *Bimarcus*. It also shows our author working out what his beliefs and attitudes are in the presence of a censorious other nature that he does not fully understand. For *Satire* 1 is not just an apology for the profession of satire, but a consideration of the question of why bother to write at all.⁴⁷ This inner dialogue will show the satirist arriving with difficulty at the attitudes that he holds, showing his own anxieties as well as the conclusions that finally triumph over them; he will write a type of satire different from Horace's, more animated by anger and invective. This inner dialogue will reappear: in *Satire* 3, someone wakes the poet up, as the latter is snoring off last night's wine; in *Satire* 4, a dialogue between Socrates and Alcibiades in Roman dress on the topic of dealing in public affairs, a scene whose logical inconsistencies dissolve when we see it as a screen for a dialogue between the author and his own teacher; and in *Satire* 5, a dialogue between the student satirist and the teacher Cornutus, in which Cornutus is directly mentioned. For the author is acutely aware of himself as a student, as a young man in need of instruction, a young man in touch with his conscience. And it is this conscience, often represented as the other voice in his *Satires*, the other voice that was once the *aduersarius* of the diatribe, that separates Persius

⁴⁵ 854A compares Aristophanes to a courtesan past her prime who pretends to be respectable, thus offending both the vulgar, who cannot tolerate her effrontery, and the wise, who despise her wickedness. The essay concludes (854D): οὐδενὶ γὰρ ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰσὶ μετρίῳ τὴν ποιήσιν γεγραφέναι, ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν αἰσχρὰ καὶ ἀσελγῇ τοῖς ἀκολάστοις, τὰ βλάσφημα δὲ καὶ πικρὰ τοῖς βασκάνοις καὶ κακοῖσι.

⁴⁶ A possible comic parallel to this is Lucian's *Zeuxis*, in which the author tells of how the painter Zeuxis was upset by people who admired the novelty and subject matter of his painting of the centaur mother suckling children from both her human and equine breasts; they should rather have admired his brushstroke and painterly technique. By analogy, Lucian asks his audience to overlook the obvious part of his comic dialogue (the humor) and concentrate rather on its substance, which is rather like inviting people to admire the emperor's new clothes.

⁴⁷ Reckford (above, note 3) 504.

from the other satirists. For Persius more than other satirists reveals his doubts and his errors, dwells on the ways in which he himself does wrong, points to himself as a sinner who is trying to do right, who points to his own failure as proof of the sinfulness of others and the need for others to reform. He is a critic of himself first, trying to discover his own moral motivations; and trying simultaneously to decide to what extent this self-definition creates a satirist, and to what extent an autonomous human being.

Sex, Money, and the Fool

Before I consider the dialogue poems, I need to discuss two main themes of the *Satires*: that one's attitude toward money and one's attitude toward sex prove one's madness. If money or physical desire create any stirrings or longings, they reveal corruption and one's distance from the truth. It is in this context that we can see the six satires as a coherent whole: not because the same themes are found throughout as some sort of leitmotiv, but because the attitude taken toward these vices changes at the end. *Satire 6* shows the author on his estate, employing his wealth, deciding not to worry about the desires of his heir but to spend as he sees fit. The author accepts wealth and family and personal desire, and in a vision of wealthy and uncommitted leisure worthy of Horace's Sabine farm he is seen to have retired from the profession of criticism. Now he directs his words to an outside audience, to Caesius Bassus.

There is one important aspect of Stoicism that goes hand-in-hand with the satires' presentation of the satirist and his satire as socially undesirable phenomena: the doctrine that all sins are equal, that none but the sage is good, that all errors entail equal guilt and are equal proof of the lack of perfection. For Persius, knowing his Stoicism as he does, knows that he is not perfect, and is therefore as morally guilty and as culpable as anyone whose extreme vices he chooses to castigate. It is possible to take the Stoic paradoxes too far; the Stoics do not say that all sins deserve equal punishment, or that all sinners are at the same remove from perfection. The Stoic on the road to perfection is closer to the goal of the sage, a level that he will achieve without his knowing it, than is the hardened criminal; the aspiring Stoic has more reason to hope that he will achieve perfection, but until he does achieve it he is a sinner.⁴⁸ Therefore, from the point of view of Stoic doctrine, the Stoic satirist is as surprising and paradoxical a creation as is the Cynic satirist: the Stoic is as guilty as those whose sins he describes. The satires of Persius are not then designed to criticize from a

⁴⁸ Rist (above, note 13) 90: "All ordinary men, therefore, are guilty. They are not, however, equally far from wisdom. Just as the man immediately below the surface, though in danger of drowning, is in fact nearer to safety than the wretch lying on the bottom, so the *προκόπτων* is nearer to virtue, in the sense that, if he continues along his present path, he will eventually become virtuous, even though he is still utterly vicious."

height, but to examine the satirist from within, in relation to society: it is Persius' recognition of his own faults, failures, and shortcomings that provides the basis for his criticism of others: Persius is in reality the most agreeable of satirists, because of his confession of his own faults.

The moral conclusions of the various satires tend to be all of a piece: you may think that you are healthy but you are not, if you have passion and greed within you. *Satire* 3 ends with the author protesting that he is not sick because he has neither fever nor chill, though he speaks of his body and not of his soul. The interlocutor rebuts (3. 107-18):⁴⁹

Should you chance to see some money, or should some fair-skinned girl next door smile a come-hither smile, does your heart beat as it should? [Now I paraphrase] Can you swallow unprocessed food? Do fear and anger excite you? You are sick, and you "say and do what insane Orestes would swear are the marks of an insane man."

This is not significantly different from the end of *Satire* 4, Socrates to Alcibiades (4. 47-50):⁵⁰

Wicked man! If you grow pale at the sight of money, if you do whatever your penis has in mind, if you are usurious [a desperate approximation for a very obscure phrase], in vain do you lend your thirsty ears to the people.

So too the end of *Satire* 5, where the matter is more drawn out. The question is one of freedom, and how only a few have true freedom, which is mastery of emotion and the absence of greed and desire. The speaker seems to be Cornutus addressing his pupil Persius (5. 115-20):

sin tu, cum fueris nostrae paulo ante farinae,
pelliculam ueterem retines et fronte politus
astutam uapido serues in pectore uolpem,
quae dederam supra relego funemque reduco.
nil tibi concessit ratio; digitum exere, peccas,
et quid tam paruum est?

Even though a little while before you were of our sack of flour, if you were to keep your old skin, wear a mask and keep within your empty heart a clever wolf, the possessions that I granted you above I take back and draw in my rope. Reason has granted you nothing: move a finger and you sin, and what is so small as this?

Any fault entails all faults. And it should be clear that Persius is not the Stoic paragon, but only the one who acknowledges and tries to live by the truth that gives freedom and life. Too many passages of moral reproof include the satirist himself, and these should not be taken merely as polite

⁴⁹ For the apportioning of the parts of this dialogue I follow R. Jenkinson, "Interpretations of Persius' Satires III and IV," *Latomus* 32 (1973) 534-49; cf. *infra*, n. 54.

⁵⁰ For the parts of this dialogue, see Jenkinson (previous note) 522-34; *infra*, n. 56.

ironies that soften his harsh message;⁵¹ he is different from other sinners primarily in that he does not tell himself lies. From *Satire 2* (62–63, 68):

quid iuuat hoc, templi nostros inmittere mores
et bona dis ex hac scelerata ducere pulpa?

. . .

peccat et haec, peccat.

What good does it do, to infect the temples with our vices and bring material offerings to the gods from this our sinful flesh? . . . It sins, yes, the flesh sins.

When someone wakes up the snoring Persius in *Satire 3* and sees him in all his faults, this someone says (30): *ego te intus et in cute noui*, "I know you inside, even under your skin." Even in the satirist there is a difference between inner reality and outward appearance, and in the satirist there is discrepancy between theory and practice. He chooses to dramatize scenes of his earlier careless life to reveal to all the need for change; in *Satire 4* the Alcibiades character rebukes Socrates, but also himself (23–24):

ut nemo in sese temptat descendere, nemo,
sed praecedenti spectatur mantica tergo!

See how no one tries to burrow into himself, no one, but the pack is only seen on the back of the one before you!

Alcibiades and Socrates exchange insults (42–45):

caedimus inque uicem praebemus crura sagittis.
uiuitur hoc pacto, sic novimus. ilia subter
caecum uulnus habes, sed lato balteus auro
praetegit.

"We slay, and in turn offer our legs to the arrows. This is the way it goes, this is the way we know." "Beneath your guts you have a hidden wound, but the belt with the big gold buckle keeps it safe."

There is something suggestive of Hawthorne in this description of hidden, ulcerous sin. The invitation to look inside is an invitation to look at emptiness. In *Satire 3* there is a powerful passage that suggests that the worst punishment a god could inflict on a mortal is introspection (3. 35–43):

magne pater diuum, saeuos punire tyrannos
haut alia ratione uelis, cum dira libido
mouerit ingenium feruenti tincta ueneno:
uirtutem uideant intabescantque relictæ.
anne magis Siculi gemuerunt aera iuueni
et magis auratis pendens laquearibus ensis

⁵¹ As does Reckford (above, note 33) speaking of *Satire 3*.

purpureas subter ceruices terruit, "imus,
imus praecipites" quam si sibi dicat et intus
palleat infelix quod proxima nesciat uxor?

Great Father of the gods, may it be your desire to punish ravening tyrants by no other means than this, when dread desire imbued with simmering poison moves their minds: let them look on virtue and waste away as it abandons them. Surely the bronze bull of Sicily moaned less, and the sword that hung from gilded chandeliers terrified the royal purple necks below less, than when he says to himself "we are lost, we are utterly lost," and is luckless enough to turn all pale inside at what the wife next to him knows nothing about.

I think that the satirist presents himself as one who knows the horror of having looked inside.

Persius has little to do with society. For criticism or even observation of the world, the satirist substitutes an inner life and reality; the point that I wish to make is that such a view should be drawn to its logical conclusion. All that we really see in Persius is a satirist talking about himself, and drawing conclusions of a general application from his won experience. Stoicism is proof of everyone's error; errors show the fool, especially the passionate errors concerning money and sex. The satirist knows that there is no sage in real life (though he is willing to describe Cornutus as one). Nor would we expect that a student praising his master would ever say, "Thank you for making me perfect." All we read is, "Thank you for showing me the error of my ways." Persius elects then to show the error of his own ways to a small, perhaps non-existent audience. I find it hard to escape the conclusion that Persius is writing these satires for himself.

Inner Dialogue in *Satires* 3, 4, and 5

If we are willing to accept that the prologue speaks of the poet as one who is motivated by base desires and who imagines that his audience will only misunderstand him, and that the burden of *Satire* 1 is that the poet debates within himself whether he should write satire and for whom, then the stage is set for further inner dialogues, in which the doubts now raised can be more fully aired. *Satires* 2 and 6 are not of this type; the former is the simple and moving proclamation that the author knows how to make a proper prayer; the latter shows the satirist at his ease, addressing an epistle to a friend from the comfort of his country seclusion. There is a logical shape to the book; the flight of the satirist to the country is prepared for by internal debates concerning the utility of satire.

Satire 3 has the poet awakened, at a late hour, from a snoring hangover. The time is announced (by one identified as one of the poet's *comites*) and the poem continues (3. 7-9):

unus ait comitum. uerumne? itan? ocius adsit
huc aliquis. nemon? turgescit atrea bilis:
findor, ut Arcadiae pecuaria rudere credas.

... says one of my friends. Is it true? Is it so? Would that someone did come double quick. Is there no one? My black bile swells and I split in two; you'd think all the asses of Arcadia were braying. I reach for a book and a pen ...

In reality, no one has spoken to him. He imagines the *comes* is present, but there is none. The poet is waking himself up; his hangover deludes him. This is not a critical fancy; you may parallel it in the first poem of Ausonius' *Daily Round*, for example.⁵² The *comes* upbraids him (15–16): *o miser inque dies ultra miser, hucine rerum / uenimus*, "O hopeless man, more hopeless with the passing days, have we finally come to this?"⁵³ The youth attempts an evasive maneuver, but the *comes* continues his speech (19–24):

—an tali studeam calamo?—cui uerba? quid istas
succinis ambages? tibi luditur. effluis amens,
contemnere. sonat uitium percussa, maligne
respondet uiridi non cocta fidelia limo.
udum et molle lutum es, nunc nunc properandus et acri
figendus sine fine rota.

"Am I to devote my time to a pen like this?" "For whom are all these words? Why do you sing me these riddles? The joke is at your expense. You are mad, unstable; you'll be despised. When the pot is tapped the flaw is heard, unfired green muck answers with a thud. You are dripping, sloppy clay; now, now is the time to hurry, to be spun endlessly on the whirling wheel."

This is the satire that continues with the prayer that the father of the gods punish tyrants by giving them a glimpse of the emptiness of their hearts; it ends with the *aduersarius fictiuus* objecting to the satirist's protestations of

⁵² This poem, in Sapphic strophes, owes much in its conception to the introduction to Persius 3. The poet address one Parmeno, who sleeps too much because of his excesses in food and drink; but when we read at the end that the poet's verses may be responsible for his stupor, and that the iambus is now needed, we see that the poet is addressing himself (21–24):

Fors et haec somnum tibi cantilena
Sapphico suadet modulata uersu?
Lesbiae depelle modum quietis,
Acer iambe.

The parallel, but not the interpretation, is noticed in Robert E. Colton, "Echoes of Persius in Ausonius," *Latomus* 47 (1988) 875–82 (875–76).

⁵³ Harvey (above, note 23) 78–79, points out the difficulties in taking *uenimus* as a poetic plural, and follows Jenkinson in attributing 15–18 to the interlocutor, who speaks as one philosopher to another: "Is this what our study is for?" But, as Harvey points out, this is not inevitable.

health by saying that it is not the fever of his body but of his soul that is the issue; the satirist is mad. Persius depicts himself as being angry at the voice that has enumerated his faults.⁵⁴ Introspection has led to generalization; it is the poet's own sinfulness that generates the satire.

Satire 4 also begins with a bit of self-examination, again featuring prominently the act of writing (4. 1–9):

Are you going to handle the affairs of the people? (Imagine that the bearded teacher is speaking, the one whom the hemlock killed.) Relying on what? Tell me that, favorite of Pericles the Great. No doubt intelligence and practical wisdom have come swift before your beard, and you know all about what to say and what not. So when the little people boil in upset and rage, your mind intends to make a silence in this astute crowd by the authority of your hand alone. What will you say then? "Citizens of Rome, consider that this is not just, this is badly done, this better."

How shall Socrates and Alcibiades speak to the citizens of Rome? Only if they are Roman. Here too we have the young student satirist receiving instruction from a grand old man of philosophy (it is not too much to see Cornutus lurking behind Socrates' beard). But this Socrates denies all of Alcibiades' qualifications: all he has is money and a good mother,⁵⁵ and Socrates says that much more important is the fact of Alcibiades' loose morals. When the conversation turns to a more general audience (no one looks inside, no one!) we hear of criticism of one man's greed delivered by a beat-out homosexual prostitute. Then the moral: we criticize and are criticized. We do not need to believe that the historical Persius reproves his historical self for sexual impropriety, but he is willing to be associated with vice, if only to show the depths from which he has come and the need for reform, first in himself and then, if they will listen, in others. This association of Persius with Alcibiades may seem unlikely at first; but the question *rem populi tractas?* which begins the satire may well be translated as "So you want to be a satirist?" and the satire concludes with Socrates telling Alcibiades to correct his own faults.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Jenkinson (above, note 49) 546–47, gives a convincing outline of the course of this satire, in which Persius speaks vv. 107–09, claiming his health; and his interlocutor details his faults in the concluding lines of the poem, vv. 109–18. Jenkinson concludes (549): "We may be intended to laugh at the expense of the *comes*, a laugh which undercuts to some extent the moral rigour of the satire—'exit pursued by a sluggard': or it may be that we are to understand a severe statement to the effect that *even now* the victim's own actions are confirming the message that is being delivered to him."

⁵⁵ Tradition has it that Persius was both a rich aristocrat and a young man devoted to his mother and his other female relations: *Vita Persi* 4–5: *eques Romanus, sanguine et affinitate primi ordinis uiris coniunctus*; 32–34: *fuit morum lenissimorum, uerecundiae uirginis, famae pulchrae, pietatis erga matrem et sororem et amitam exempla sufficientis. fuit frugi, pudicus*.

⁵⁶ Jenkinson (above, note 49) 534 allots the parts of the dialogue as follows: Socrates speaks vv. 1–22, 33–41, 43b–46a, 47b–52; Alcibiades, vv. 23–32, 42–43a, 46b–47a.

Satire 5 is typically taken as a dialogue between the satirist and Cornutus; it may however be Persius' confession to Cornutus, whose presence is imagined.⁵⁷ Here someone objects to the language of Persius' poetry (he has been too fanciful in his opening lines) and we see again Persius' nervousness about the very act of writing in verse; his is supposed to be unobtrusive, and yet also not plebeian. Persius' strange language is supposed to distance him both from the pomposness of contemporary poets and from the pedestrian thoughts of the vulgar. It is quite clear that the language is a private language, designed to represent the tortured thoughts of an introspective nature that is horrified at the contemplation of human nature. As the satirist describes it (5. 19–25):

I have no interest in this, that my page swell with black nonsense, suitable only as a mass for the fire. *We are speaking in private.* At the instigation of our Muse we give our hearts to you to be shaken out, and it is good to show you, dear friend, how great a part of our soul is yours, Cornutus. Feel my pulse, you who make careful distinctions between what rings solid and what is the mere plaster of a painted tongue. And so would I dare put aside those hundred voices that with a pure voice I may draw forth how much of you I have fixed in the folds of my bosom, and that words may reveal all that lies ineffably hidden in my inner recesses.

Persius goes on to describe those ethical truths that he learned from his master; he offers them back to the one who taught him. He knows that no one else will care; tell this to a centurion, the poem ends, and he'll laugh and say a hundred Greeks aren't worth a plugged nickle. It may be some sort of modern critical truism that language serves not to unite but to divide, that language serves to isolate a group of people with shared interests and not to communicate to everyone; but I think that in Persius we have an example of a consciously enunciated literary and stylistic theory that makes the poet the primary recipient of his own poetry and language.

But there remains the logical conundrum: why write? Isn't Persius still convicting himself of passion and pride by writing poetry? What good does he do to write to himself? If we had only the first five poems there would be no very good answer to this question. But the sixth provides the answer in the depiction of a Persius who has decided, after all of his introspective angst, not to worry, to take it easy, to live with himself and without the memories of the past and the shadow of his teacher. First, I offer an outline of the progress of the book through *Satire 5*.

Satire 1 asks whether satire does any good for the people at large and the answer is no. They can read something else. *Satire 2* is the most serious of the poems, and comes first after the introductory satire. Its theme: I can make a holy prayer by offering truth and sincerity to the gods, even if the flesh is sinful. The poem makes a strong distinction between

⁵⁷ See Paratore's reservations; *supra*, n. 35.

willing mind and weak flesh. *Satire 3* has the poet remembering a dissolute youth and childhood, and moving from a recollection of his own errors to a general contemplation of those who do not realize their errors even in their old age. *Satire 4*, the dialogue between the Roman Socrates and the Roman Alcibiades, asks whether the author will be involved with the affairs of the people, whether he will criticize other people's ways? The revulsion felt toward things vulgar leaves the satirist unwilling to enter the public forum either as a politician or as a satirist. To criticize is to expose your faults to view. *Satire 5*, the satirist's secret address to Cornutus, discusses freedom, not as found in politics and the illusions of social and political liberty but in devotion to study and Stoic precepts. Various substitutes for the virtuous life pass in review: Greed and Virtue pull in opposite directions (5. 154-55): *duplici in diuersum scinderis hamo. / huncine an hunc sequeris?* The life of virtue demands separation from society. *Satire 6* comes as a logical conclusion to all of this.

Now the mood of *Satire 6* has always been regarded as different, and Stoicism seems not to make an appearance.⁵⁸ The language is the same, Persius' private language, but its direction is not that of a satire. It is much more like an epistle, and we can include that, as well as scazon and satire, in the *satura* of Persius. *Satire 6* opens with an evocation of a beautiful natural setting, the port of Luna on the Ligurian coast. It finds the satirist resolved to live within the limits, but to the limits, of his estate. He overrides objections that spending may diminish the heirs' estate; he cares little for heirs; they should be glad with what they get; he is not going to live on nettles and smoked hog jowls for the benefit of an heir's immoral descendant (6. 62-74). Should he reduce himself to a skeleton for that? (6. 73-77): *mihi trama figurae / sit reliqua. ast illi tremat omento popa uenter?* The conclusion is brief (6. 75-80):

Sell your soul for cash, shake down every corner of the world, buy and sell in sharp practice, be second to none in buying foreign slaves right off the block. Double your investments. "I have; now it's triple, quadruple; now tenfold it comes into my purse. Tell me where to stop!" Chrysippus, the solution to your paradox of the heap has now been found.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Harvey (above, note 23) 1: "Stoicism is most noticeable in *Satires 3* and *5*, but it runs through all his other poems with the exception of *Satire 6*."

⁵⁹ The suggestion of Hugo Beikircher, *Kommentar zur VI. Satire des A. Persius Flaccus*, Wiener Studien, Beiheft 1 (Wien-Köln-Graz 1969) 124-25, that the satirist takes the interlocutor's *depunge ubi sistam* of v. 79 as the protasis of a condition to which he then supplies his own apodosis is attractive: "'Show me where to stop . . . ' . . . and the solution of the sorites argument has been found." Persius implies that greed is insatiable, and that, just as one cannot define precisely at what point a heap is achieved by addition, the greedy person cannot tell when he has enough. (Harvey *ad loc.* confuses the issue, imagining that if 100 grains of sand make a heap, it cannot be said that 101 do not; rather, if 100 grains of sand make a heap, why not 99?) This is from the greedy person's point of view; but another interpretation is possible. To the moralist speaking of money, there is a solution to the sorites conundrum:

The satirist enjoys his wealth and prosperity with Stoic intelligence. Mastering wealth instead of being mastered by wealth is one of the signs of the Stoic sage that has been alluded to all along. The interlocutor is in thrall to Greed and Ambition. The satirist bids him go to Hell, and there he cheerfully goes. The satirist does not try to correct; he has found his rest and retirement despite the errors of the world.

It may be that *Satire 1* is the last of the *Satires*, and *Satire 5* is the first. As Reckford describes the chronology of the *Satires*, we can see the progression from a Horatian view of satire, to a new conception, in which the satirist must address the question of why he should write satire.⁶⁰ But the book itself shows the satirist moving from his new, Stoic conception of satire to the mild-mannered and Horatian one; finally, he slips the noose of satire altogether, and, in imitation of Horace, adopts a pose of ease and comfort. Apart from society, he is no longer worried about the things that had so animated him. Money is no problem now, and does not show him to be the fool. While he is not said to be married, he now contemplates an heir, without worrying too much, in good Socratic fashion, about how he might be involved in the welfare of his children. Sex and money do not make him a fool; he is now separate from the crowd; he has learned how to be human, in his Stoic sense, by retiring from society and from the criticism of society. Now he does not worry about writing. He has a specific addressee, Caesius Bassius, also imagined to be sharing an idyllic retreat, in Horace's Sabinum. There is a touch of self-congratulation, almost of gloating, as he now undertakes to see humanity from a distance, to see people not through the glasses of his own past but as people who will never have his peace. But peace has been found.

Conclusion

The book of Persius' *Satires* presents a coherent progression of an introspective critic of society, who looks within himself for an understanding of the nature of vice, who comes to see that he is a part of society (with wealth and aristocratic position), but who preserves himself by removing himself from it. He worries about poetry because it is self-aggrandizing, but he ultimately comes to live with it. He puts the errors of his past behind him. Society and experience only serve to put into sharp relief his own need for the truth; the goal of his preaching is only himself.

any amount over what you already have (that is, any display of greed) creates the heap (which is too much). Cf. Epictetus *Ench.* 39: τοῦ γὰρ ἅπαξ ὑπὲρ τὸ μέτρον ὄρος οὐθείς ἐστιν. It should also be noted that the Stoics themselves considered the argument fallacious, and allowed the wise man to suspend judgement in such questions; cf. Rist (above, note 13) 145–46.

⁶⁰ Reckford (above, note 3) 503–04.

But more than this, I do not suggest that this is just Persius' idiosyncratic interpretation of what satire is about. After the days of Lucilius, in which the example of the self-defeating and self-parodic *Menippean Satires* of Varro comes to the fore and verse satire abandons politics in favor of the ethical generalities of the diatribe, satire becomes a genre that creates unified books that detail the inability of a satirist to correct his society. The satirist retires in the face of human and social error; there is no salvation for the satirist in society, and he can only take his place outside of it. He cannot really understand other people, so he tries to understand himself. He knows that a satirist is a social evil; he makes fun of himself and his quest even as he hopes to find some peace outside of the social and political order. Stoicism is an ideal philosophy to treat in a genre so conceived; Stoicism in Persius is not an imposition on the genre, but a reasonable working out of its inner characteristics.

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

